

What is real power?

By Mary Jo Asmus on July 16th, 2014

Leadership just isn't what it used to be. Thank goodness! We've all known of organizational cultures where the managers' use of command and control is a source of power. Because we are now in an age of flattened organizational structures, global broad based knowledge, and speed-of-light decision making, real leadership power lies in work relationships that are formed and intentionally sustained.

In the next 20 years, we'll see more change in how managers lead. Although there are still pockets of managers who grasp for power through force and strength, they'll leave and be replaced with a new type of manager. This manager will be adept at *real* power. They'll share influence by being a catalyst to bring out the best in their stakeholders and organizations.

They'll focus on others as a significant investment as opposed to simply checking off items on a "to do" list. The managers who are adept at force and control will not survive, except perhaps in rare cases where safety and security may be necessary.

Up and coming managers: be ready! Your time will come to lead on a bigger scale and change the world! You might as well begin learning about how to have real power now. Your real power is in:

Relationships: Always pay attention to the relationships you need to foster that are mutually beneficial. Develop them, sustain them, and mend them as necessary. This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with those you lead; it simply means that you need to be able to work with each other for the common good. You don't even have to like each other, but you do have to clean out your personal closets of assumptions, judgments and beliefs to be able to achieve together. Be honest and foster trust at all times, especially when you disagree.

Collaboration: Gone are the days of competing with internal (and sometimes external) stakeholders to foster creativity or to get your way. Collaboration is the new currency in the sense that it goes miles beyond cooperation (which generally means to "go along" even though you might disagree). When you collaborate, you leave behind your self-interest to achieve goals for the greater good. Embrace collaboration and model it for others.

Equality: Real trust doesn't happen without a sense of equality between leaders and stakeholders. Inequality is behind the use of force, fear, coercion or control, and it breaks trust. When that happens, lost revenue or missed opportunities aren't far behind. Don't put yourself "above" others by judging them to be something less than yourself. Everyone has a stake in organizational success, and when you lead in the spirit of equality, trust and success will follow.

Conversation: All ideas, progress, relationships and success are built on a foundation of conversation. Yet, when you are so focused on getting things done, you may forget that the people doing the work need dialog to be their best. Stop and think often about the conversations

you need to have; then, have them! You can't lead alone, and powerful two-way conversations are crucial to making the right decisions.

Coaching: Consider what our organizations will become when every leader believes that coaching others is an imperative instead of a time-waster. Coaching grows people, and when people grow, organizational performance thrives. One of your real powers is knowing how and when to coach others. When you coach, you are able to watch the expansiveness for thought, creativity, and innovation that occur in others. You can revel in the impact this has on your organization.

We're at the precipice of a new time that calls for new kinds of power. Embrace these new sources of power and watch your organization flourish!

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